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**STATEMENT OF**  
**THE HONORABLE BILL CASSIDY**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE**  
**OVERSIGHT HEARING**  
**ON THE REPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**INSPECTOR GENERAL ON NOAA ENFORCEMENT**

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

Madam Chair, this hearing was scheduled to examine some disturbing findings about the NOAA fisheries enforcement programs, as reported by the Department of Commerce Inspector General.

Fisheries laws need to be enforced. Those fishermen who cheat affect the livelihood of those who play by the rules. But according to the Inspector General's report, in at least one region of the country, fisheries enforcement has been considered arbitrary and enforcement officers have lost the respect of the fishing community.

In order for fisheries management to be effective, the rules and regulations need to be clear and enforcement needs to be consistent and fair.

As the report notes, there needs to be a level of trust among fishery managers, law enforcement, and the regulated community. There needs to be trust that the rules are being enforced fairly and evenly. This report argues that, at least in one region of the country, the system has broken down.

The Inspector General's report has made a few things clear including the fact that fisheries rules and regulations are complicated. In addition, the report shows that there needs to be oversight at a higher level within NOAA.

Finally, the report makes it very clear that NOAA needs to listen to fishermen's concerns.

The report makes little mention of the role that state law enforcement plays through Cooperative Enforcement Agreements with NOAA. I'm interested to know how enforcement by state agencies was taken into account as the Inspector General performed the investigation and prepared the findings. I'd also like to hear the panelists' recommendations for the future enforcement role of the states.

I look forward to hearing the testimony today and hearing what NOAA will do to address the serious issues raised by the Inspector General's report.